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SUICIDAL BEHAVIOUR
AMONG THE NETSILIK ESKIMOS

by

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of the

National Museum of Canada

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During two field trips in the summer of 1959 and the winter of 1960 among the Arviligjuar Eskimos of Pelly Bay, District of Keewatin, a considerable number of successful and attempted suicide cases were recorded. The survey also gathered data on interpersonal and intergroup relations, namely shaman-patient, shaman-shaman interactions, sharing practices, problems of circulation of women, parents-descendants relations, feuding, etc. A first analysis of this material indicated a very low level of social integration of traditional Netsilik society. Following Durkheim's typology, I hypothetically considered these cases as belonging to the egoistic type of suicide. Thus my conclusions differed from Professor A. Leighton's functional analysis of "altruistic" suicide practices among the Yuit Eskimos in Eastern Siberia. This ethnographic paper is essentially an effort towards the understanding of Netsilik suicide practices in relation to the low level of social integration characteristic of that society.

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The Pelly Bay Eskimos' traditional habitat covers a vast area in the High Arctic. Their shifting camps may be located on Simpson Peninsula or in the inland regions around Hay river. Seal and caribou hunts have brought them North to Tom Bay, Lord Mayor Bay and the southern fringes of Boothia Peninsula. Pelly Bay and the immediately adjacent territories remain, however, the central district of this vast region. These Eskimos call themselves Arviligjuarmiut (people of the big one with the whale) and are considered a sub-group of the large Netsilik "tribe". As recently as thirty years ago, they were living an almost fully aboriginal life, contacts with our civilization being remarkably few. The traditional annual cycle of the Arviligjuarmiut reveals both an inland summer adaptation with intensive caribou hunts from kayaks and a winter sealing pattern at the breathing holes. This latter technique is extremely elaborate, and considering the sheer number of specialized tools used, about 12, we can safely speculate about the ancient maritime adaptation of this group. The data we have indicate a Central Arctic type of social organization characterized by a family level of social integration, bilaterality in descent, general neolocality with some tendency towards patrilocality during the first year of married life, absence of unilineal forms of kin groupings and an Eskimo type of kinship terminology. Religion was little different from

that of the neighbouring tribes, the shaman cured the sick, called the game, adjusted the observation of the numerous taboos.

Rifles were introduced in the area in this century. The general use of firearms drastically reduced the size of the migrating caribou herds in the area during the last twenty years. Clothing had to be imported from the Repulse Bay store. The decrease of the caribou deprived the Eskimos of a valuable source of food. There is no clear evidence, however, past or present, that Pelly Bay is, or has been, a place of regular starvation.

Following the arrival of a Catholic missionary in 1936, these Eskimos collectively converted to Christianity.

In the field of religious beliefs and practices, the consequences of this conversion were far reaching. In 1959, the younger generation was largely ignorant of the ancient beliefs. This was not the case, however, with some elderly men and women.

The Arviligjuarmiut number presently about 120 individuals. During the last fifty years, according to the collected data, 50 cases of successful and attempted suicide occurred in the general area; 35 represent successful suicides, 4 attempted but unsuccessful suicides; 11 individuals expressed their intention to kill themselves but did not go further for various reasons.

The "tribal" affiliations of these 50 individuals indicate 32 Arviligjuarmiut, 10 Netsilikmiut proper, 1 Illuilermiô of Adelaide Peninsula, 1 Aivilikmiô and 6 Eskimos of unknown affiliations.

Of the 32 Arviligjuarmiut, 23 committed successful suicide, it is this last number we intend to consider in the following comparative frequency analysis. We mentioned that in 1959 the group consisted of 120 Eskimos. Rasmussen, however, who surveyed the area in 1923, counted only 54 Arviligjuarmiut, less than half the present number. Natural population increase and various forms of immigration account for the difference. We may consider the average population around Pelly Bay to have been around 80 for the last 50 years, we thus obtain a frequency of 575 Arviligjuarmiut suicides per 100,000 living for one year contrasted with 15.6 suicides per 100,000 living in the U.S.A. for 1930, a rate considered by Dublin and Bunzel as occupying a middle position among the rates of countries for which records are available (Dublin and Bunzel, p. 19). Thus generally the Arviligjuarmiut suicide rate is more than 30 times higher than the U.S. rate. Despite the fact that life expectancy is much lower among the Eskimos, this figure indicates, certainly in a very approximative way, the high frequency of suicide in the Netsilik area.

Our record shows that males have a greater tendency to suicide than females. The age distribution of our cases shows one ten year old boy, 5 young adults 15 to 20 years old, 24 adults 20 to 55 years of age, 6 individuals over 55 and under 60, and 12 elderly persons. We can immediately note that the presence in our record of such a large number of adults and young individuals makes a comparison difficult with what we know about Eskimo suicides in other areas where usually elderly people kill themselves to avoid becoming a burden to the community.

Our 50 cases are somewhat regularly distributed during the last fifty years. The oldest case took place after the turn of the century, while the most recent attempt occurred only a few weeks before my arrival in Pelly Bay last summer.

Married individuals are clearly in predominance; 34 were married and had children, three were married without children, 3 elderly women were widows and 5 individuals only were not married. The presence of a large number of married individuals in our records can be easily explained by the socio-economic organization of the Arctic people emphasizing a rigorous complementarity of the sexual division of labor within the nuclear family.

There is considerable variation in suicide techniques. Eleven individuals used a gun in killing or trying to kill themselves. Kaokortok aimed at his heart. Tallerk, a shaman, pointed his gun against his chest hoping to break his spine. The bullet passed through his body, missing the spine and made a big hole in the snow wall of the igloo. Tallerk, being a shaman, did not even bleed. Ubloreasuksuk killed himself with a bullet in the chest while Iakka placed the gun under his chin. Avagaidje hoped to hit his brain but the bullet passed through the lower part of his nose.

Twenty-three individuals have hanged themselves using skin thongs. Akuardjuk, an elderly woman, did so under a prominent rock. Kangmar, another elderly woman, attached the thong to a horizontally lying stick on top of the igloo and hanged herself inside the dwelling. This latter technique seems to be preferred.

There are four cases of strangulation. Inuksak, an elderly man, placed vertically two sticks in the ground and stabilized them with some stones. He crossed their tops with a thong which provided him also with a knot around his neck; the structure being somewhat low, he kneeled under it and started pulling down, soon his body appeared heavily suspended on the thong; Inuksak was dead. A similar technique was employed by Tunnuq who

strangled herself with a thong attached to the upper end of a peg she held with both hands. Tallerk, the shaman, who did not bleed after he shot himself because of his supernatural powers, asked the following day to be strangled. Tallerk was lying on the sleeping bench while two men were pulling the ends of a thong knotted around the shaman's neck. They had to pull very hard, "because Tallerk was a shaman."

Irkrowatok was a blind woman about 35 years old, happily married with two children. During the winter migrations, she used to follow the trail by feeling with her outstretched hands the back of the sled. During a stop she removed the thong from around her waistline, attached one end to the sled while the other became a knot around her neck. When her husband gave the departure signal to the dogs the sled moved swiftly forward and Irkrowatak rolled in the snow, strangled.

Two cases of drowning were recorded. Kaka, a young woman, decided to put an end to her life by walking over the thin autumn ice of a lake until it broke through under her feet.

The appearance of suicidal propensities in certain individuals gives rise to highly revealing interactions usually with relatives.

Our record shows that 34 individuals entered in some sort of interaction with other Eskimos during the visible operation of the suicidal process. Eleven verbally expressed their desire to kill themselves; six individuals announced their wish to be executed by somebody else; two asked the help of others to terminate their act; eighteen consulted relatives prior to going further; nine were successfully stopped by relatives from killing themselves.

In our search for a meaningful criteria for classifying the suicide cases we followed Durkheim's approach by paying little attention to the multiplicity of the immediate causes of suicide as outlined by our informants. The criteria had to be of sufficient generality in order to allow us to see beyond the descriptive level and perceive what Bachelard has called "le cache" of a given phenomena.

It seemed that the essential characteristic of about half of the number of our cases was a preoccupation with the other during the emergence of the suicidal process. The fatal decision may be spontaneous and take the form of a reaction to a disaster occurring to another individual, or slow, following a succession of misfortunes. In all these cases the suicidal decisions can be understood only within a set of pre-existing social relations. The rest of our cases seem much simpler. They appear as a response to a disaster striking the very individual who intends to

commit suicide. A few examples will illustrate these two categories of suicide.

A:- Irkrowatok, the blind woman who strangled herself, had a son-in-law, a good hunter by the name of Oaniuk, who was accidentally killed during a hunt. When she learned about Oaniuk's death, Irkrowatok said she wanted to kill herself. For about a year, her husband who had two wives, succeeded in dissuading her. He used to tell her: "Don't do it, so that the children may grow up near their mother." Irkrowatok was useful in the household, she was still a good needle worker. When she strangled herself behind the sled, her husband said: "This woman didn't have any pity for her children." Her body remained on the sea ice covered only with snow because she did not want to trouble her people with the preparation of a stone grave.

We mentioned that Oanik was killed accidentally during a hunt. It was Okoktok, a poor hunter, who shot him during a caribou chase. Our informant is specific about the unintentional character of this tragedy: "It is certain that Okoktok didn't want to kill Oaniuk because the latter was a very excellent hunter." Oaniuk, agonizing, had a word of revenge and looked for his gun. He did not fulfil his wish. Later, Okoktok, feeling guilty, became very depressed and while visiting his neighbours declared himself ready to be killed. He

received the following answer: "You are not a good game, if you want to kill yourself, go out and do it yourself." That is precisely what Okoktok did.

Oaniuk's accidental death was instrumental in determining a third suicide: his mother's. Oaniuk was Akuardjuk's only living son. The elderly woman was in her tent when she heard about the accident. She immediately took a thong and ran towards the place of the tragedy. She saw her son's body lying on the ground and a few moments later, hanged herself from a high rock. People saw her running with the thong, knew what she intended to do bot nobody tried to stop her.

Kaokortok's case appears as really strange. He was married to Unalerdjuar and in the process of wife exchange used to borrow Adgoner's wife. Thinking about this other woman, Kaokortok asked his wife: "You really don't want another woman in the igloo to help you," The reply was negative and contained an invitation to the husband to kill himself. Kaokortok asked her to fetch something from the neighbours. Alone in the igloo, he shot himself. Our informant added: "He killed himself because he was angry with his wife."

Avagaidje was convinced that a man wanted to steal his wife. Avagaidje wanted to kill her; she managed, however, to run away. Then he pointed the gun against himself and fired. He did not die immediately and managed

to make a sign to the people around him inviting them to hit him over the head. He was hanged shortly after.

Kaka was young woman married to Ikjuktar. Her husband died one day by drowning and soon after, Kaka decided by herself to marry Kraonik as his second wife, which she did. Later, however, she became very unhappy, and had in mind to quit Kraonik. "Maybe she wanted another man and couldn't get him," "Kaka hated everybody, but the other people did not hate her," says our informant. One day, she left the camp without saying anything, people suggested that she wanted to kill herself, she did not hide her intentions. She broke the thin ice on a small lake and drowned.

Kungarnar, a young man, was hunting caribou on the thin autumn ice over a caribou crossing point. The hunters were driving the frightened animals together until the ice broke under their weight after which the hunt continued with spears. Kungarnar was running after the herd when the ice broke under his feet and he disappeared in the icy water. Kungarnar's father was dead, his mother with whom he used to live was in camp. As soon as she learned about the tragedy, she took a thong and started running towards the lake. On her way, she met a group of people to whom she said, pointing to the thong: "With that I will make a whip for my son." She reached the lake, spent some time looking for the body, and quickly left to hang herself from a high cliff.

Kovalar was an excellent hunter. His five year old son was very sick. Kovalar, his clothes off, was lying on the sleeping bench, trying to warm the child. His wife objected angrily that he was lying in the warm skins instead of hunting on the sea ice. The implied meaning of this was: considering that you don't do anything, why don't you kill yourself so that the child may survive! Kovalar asked: "Do you really mean it," She replied: "Yes", and Kovalar hanged himself immediately in the igloo.

Orshoriktok, a heavily built and mediocre hunter, was stalking caribou with his 17 year old son, Alornerk. The young hunter, having finished his ammunition, asked for his father's gun. Orshoriktok was about to give him his weapon, when the latter fired accidentally and killed the young man. Orshoriktok immediately prepared to kill himself.

B:- Tallerk, the shaman, was suffering from an illness in the chest. He asked his wife to kill herself in order for him to survive. She refused. Soon after, he committed suicide. Okpik, an adult hunter, Nakungaruk, a young man, and Ubloreasuksuk, an elderly man of high prestige killed themselves because they were ill. Iakka suffered from headaches; for more than a day his face was swollen; he surreptitiously managed to get a cartridge intending to kill himself in front of the igloo; his wife managed to stop him at the last second; next day, he was cured,

following a session of krilaut, shamanistic treatment. Pilaka's breast was covered with pus, and he looked as though he would die. Despite the opposition of his relatives he shot himself. Recently, in 1957, a seriously ill man told his relatives: "I want to kill myself. If the white men don't learn about it, nothing will happen." Omaioar's knees became frozen during the winter migrations. The sore was open and Omaioar, a youngster was unable to walk. There was hunger in the band and moving forward to better hunting grounds was imperative. Omaioar asked to be left behind. The people agreed. They made a trench in the snow about his size, covered with caribou skins. Omaioar was placed in there in a sitting position, with a little food. A small igloo was built over him. No one returned to see him.

Two families are voyaging in a canoe across Pelly Bay. Suddenly a strong wind starts blowing, the sea waves become dangerous. The travellers believe everything is about to be lost. A 10 year old boy was persistently asking for a gun to kill himself.

Let us enumerate briefly the main motives of suicide as given by our informants. About twenty individuals reached the suicidal decision following a disaster occurring to a near relative, usually a descendant. Sixteen other individuals took the fatal decision because of a disaster occurring to themselves, namely, illness.

In six cases we find marital dissatisfaction. Informants were specific that only four elderly persons killed themselves because of old age.

Three general factors explanatory of suicide have been proposed by the classic eskimologists as valid for the whole of the Eskimo area.

First, the well known ecological factor. It is said that the harshness of life is such in the Arctic that unproductive individuals cannot remain with the roaming band. Killing of the aged by near relatives or their suicides are thus sociologically equivalent phenomena. Weyer, who has summarized most of the available evidence writes: "The disposing of one who is aged and infirm sometimes seems, indeed, to be more the will of the fated one than of those devoted to him who will live on" (Weyer, p. 138). The ecological approach, in this simple form, is of little help for the analysis of the Netsilik data. Firstly, only four individuals in our records have committed suicide specifically because of old age. Considering the disabled and ill in only one case, Omaioar's, the boy with the frozen knee, do we find the active collaboration of the group in the suicidal process; our data point to the contrary, the sick person's relatives try to dissuade him from committing suicide. Finally, ecologic or economic factors cannot explain the suicide of a large number of healthy adults and young men.

Second is a factor related to the Eskimo conception of life and death. Weyer writes: "In the pursuance of his hunting activities the Eskimo is constantly brought face to face with death, and he grows to regard life as a thing of little account. Like the Stoic who argues, metaphorically, that if the chimney smokes one should get out of the house, the Eskimo justifies suicide, especially if age or infirmity renders one useless and a burden" (Weyer, p. 248). This is a dangerous assertion based on analogical thinking: because one has met dead beings he is not afraid anymore of death! We certainly do not mean that the Eskimo image of life, death and afterlife elaborated by the ethnographers is untrue, all that we do is to reject this mechanistic interpretation of Eskimo suicide by Weyer.

The third factor is very important. Religious beliefs seem to influence Eskimo suicide practices. The Eskimos hold the belief that the nature, the technique, of death may influence the destiny of the human soul in the afterlife. The souls of the individuals who suffered a violent form of death, including those who committed suicide, may go to a semi-paradise, one of the three afterworlds known generally by the Eskimos. Rasmussen has recorded similar beliefs among the Netsilik. Further, he describes suicide cases from Igloolik where religious beliefs have influenced suicidal decisions: one young man

killed himself because he wished to live in the underworld where his mother was. Unfortunately, we have no information in our records on the religious factors involved in Netsilik suicidal behavior. Our informants repeatedly reported their ignorance about any religious factors determining a suicide. Such factors, however, may have been operative. How important they were in the suicidal process perhaps we will never be able to learn.

These three factors, as important they may be, seem insufficient in providing us with a framework for the understanding of Netsilik suicide practices. Our cases point to a certain easiness among the Eskimos to leave this world, when, under certain concrete conditions, an almost inevitable suicidal tendency develops. The overwhelmed individual seems no more related to his wider social milieu, to his people. It is precisely this lack of wider relatedness we have to understand.

We do not suggest that the individual is completely isolated. It seems, however, that he is closely tied to only a very small number of relatives and when one of these dies he has no substitute. He does not seem related to any larger social groupings. This lack of relatedness may be equally applicable to the suicide cases following an illness or a personal disaster. The illness seems to exhaust very easily the resistance of the Netsilikmiô, he quickly abandons hope for recovery and losing sight of all these things which made life worth living urges death to come.

We will make this lack of wider relatedness the center of our analysis, following the methodological procedure called by Professor Gurvitch "intégration directe dans des ensembles réels." He writes: "Il arrive parfois que les faits observés ne peuvent être liés même par des covariations, correlations ou régularités tendancielles. Et cependant leur détérmination ne paraît pas inspirer de doute. C'est alors qu'on recourt à leur intégration dans un ensemble plus ou moins connu et dont l'on présuppose que ces faits sont des manifestations. Et l'on reste ainsi entièrement fidèle au déterminisme, tout en désignant parfois ce procédé, assez arbitrairement, comme "compréhension," (Gurvitch, p. 66). Certain aspects of Netsilik social organization may be considered here as the equivalent of these "ensembles réels".

Our procedure is roughly similar to that outlined by Simpson: "The basic problem for social research must be to interrelate the life-histories of individual suicides and attempted suicides with sociological variables, on the hypothesis that certain social environments may (a) induce or (b) perpetuate or (c) aggravate the suicide-potential." ("Suicide" by Durkheim, trans. by G. Simpson, pp. 25-26). Following Professor Sorokin's distinction, for analytical purposes, we will disregard what he has called the "logico-meaningful integration" and accept a quasi-organismic, relational definition of the term.

Space limitations forbid us a complete enumeration of Netsilik collaborative practices during the traditional and post traditional periods. Prominent among these is a group pattern of sealing at the breathing holes accompanied by highly complex and rigid sharing rules. Caribou hunting from kayaks involves extensive collaboration between beaters and kayakers, although there are additional individual caribou hunting techniques. Fishing on the stone weirs necessitates communal construction work. The group character of these activities to which individualistic alternatives exist are determined, however, mostly by natural and technological imperatives.

Although most shaministic practices involve only a curer-patient type of relationship, in some instances the shaman acts as a medium between the spirit world and the group as a whole (e.g. when destroying evil spirits in a new sealing camp.

The kinship organization of the Netsilikmiut shows essentially a family level of social integration. There are no unilinear kin groupings. Descent is bilateral, inheritance rules are vague and allowing considerable latitude in personal choice, residence is neolocal, with a tendency to patrilocality during the first years of married life. Depite the fact that the nuclear family is the most important domestic unit, a wider, largely bilateral kinship grouping is recognized (ilagheet or

circle of relatives). While some affinals are excluded from it, it is preferably within this group that mates are looked for. Although an important element of social cohesion, the ilagheet is not a localized group and has little economic significance. Smaller groups of relatives, like two married brothers, a father with his married sons, are more important for all practical purposes because they camp together and share their food.

Widespread joking relationships and wife-exchange partnerships are seemingly factors of social cohesion. In many cases, however, they have finished with wrestling matches, drum duels and suicides.

Collaborative practices in the fields of government and decision-taking are very few. In the winter sealing camps an elderly and experienced hunter will question the hunters about their willingness to go hunting and will choose the general area of the expedition. When moving camp, the advice of an elder member of the restricted ilagheet is sought. It is with this elder that sometime younger men discuss informally their hunting plans. Murder usually calls for blood revenge from the members of the restricted ilagheet. Very often, however, this does not take place. As Steenhoven has pointed out, Netsilik legal concepts are generally vague and inapplicable. Disputes are sometimes settled through wrestling matches and derisive song duels.

To sum up, except for certain group elaborations resulting from technological and ecological necessities, Netsilik society presents a very loose form of social integration. The absence of formal government, priestly organizations, territorial administration, formalized means of social control and unilinear kinship groupings point essentially to a family level of social integration. Within this framework "individualistic" traits are, needless to say, very numerous.

We can, however, go one step further. We may assume that in such a loosely organized society, in the absence of specific juridical structures and given certain opportunities, latent disorganizational tendencies may appear. And that is exactly what has happened in the area. During our second field trip to Pelly Bay, numerous instances of in-group strife were recorded. Although these occur in many areas of social life and could be studied under numerous headings, only two categories will be presented here, pertaining to (a) the circulation of women and (b) the relations with certain supernaturals.

(a) Central in the problem of circulation of women are the extensive female infanticide practices of the Netsilik. At Malerualik, in 1924, Rasmussen interviewed 18 women on this subject. Although the exact number of girls born is not given, Rasmussen writes:

"This list, showing 96 births for 18 marriages and 38 girls killed, is sufficient in itself. Eloquent, too, is the fact that of the 259 souls in the Netsilik tribe only 109 are females, whereas 150 are males. Despite the high birthrate the tribe is moving towards extinction if girl children are to be consistently suppressed." (Rasmussen, p. 141).

The consequences of such a custom can be easily guessed. The males fought each other in order to acquire a wife, the most important possession of a Netsilikmiô. Dozens of examples may substantiate this statement. Here are a few related very briefly:

1) Pangninoag, brother of Ubloreasuksuk, didn't have a wife. He decided to steal young Angnangoraq, wife of adolescent Qukik. The two brothers entered her igloo and in the presence of her husband grabbed her and started pulling her out. Qukik tried to fight, he didn't offer, however, much resistence because he was young and was scared of the two brothers.

2) Kigirtak was already married to Nuyagitcho, he wanted, however, to have a second wife. Thus when Admadlw, wife of Padlaq, accompanied by her mother-in-law visited Kigirtak's camp, Kigirtak simply kept her.

3) Inukshlugardjuk's wife died and left him alone with two children. People heard that Inukshlugardjuk wanted to steal a woman. Qaqerq and Krabviuraq were brothers. Qaqerq was afraid that Inukshlugardjuk might kill him in order to take his wife. So he advised Inukshlugardjuk to kill his brother instead and steal his wife. That is what Inukshlugardjuk did, stabbing sleeping Krabviuraq with a knife, and taking his wife away.

Such was the fear of the husbands that while on the hunt they were reluctant to leave their wives alone in the igloos. When it was impossible for the wife to accompany her husband; she usually moved into the igloo of a related family.

(b) The Netsilik Eskimos recognize three classes of medicine men. These use different shamanistic techniques and their relations with the supernatural are of different orders. They have one common trait: most of their activity is beneficial to the community, they and only they can cure the sick. Aggressive witchcraft, however, can be practiced by all Netsilikmiut, together with the shamans. Numerous lay techniques are known: (ilihiitchut) placing pointed objects or exuvia in graves, mixing seal meat with menstrual blood, touching somebody with a dead man's mitt, etc. Shamans usually prefer dispatching their own protective spirits (tonrat) on aggressive missions. Witchcraft, however, has one remarkable peculiarity: once a spirt has

been asked to kill or paralyze somebody, it becomes at this very moment tönraq kiǧdloreto or crooked spirit, potentially dangerous to everybody, including the very sender of the spirit and his relatives. In the kigdloreto for some reason fails to strike properly the enemy, bloodthirsty as it is, it may decide to bring sickness to the whole camp.

1) After the death of her husband, Arnapak, a shaman, moved with her sons among the Kaǧnermiut which she wanted to marry again. The young man she had her eye on didn't want to marry her, presumably because of her age. Then Arnapak decided to take revenge by sending her tönraq caribou against him. This man one day saw a caribou on an island, he went after it; the caribou attacked him and he was killed; the people saw that happen, they saw also Arnapak smiling; that way they found out what had really happened. Shortly after the Kaǧnermiut put Arnapak and her sons to death, by shooting them with arrows, from behind.

2) Some angakoks were very jealous of successful hunters. Tavoq the shaman disliked Angutitak, a very good hunter, he did iligiitchut against him. Just when Angutitak was stalking some caribou, Tavoq raised a snow storm which blinded the hunter. Later Angutitak avenged himself: he chased the seals from under the breathing hole where Tavoq was hunting.

Thus the Netzilikmiô used to live in constant fear. He believed that his neighbours or some evil spirit might bring him sickness, paralysis or death at any time.

Now we can better understand the relations of the individual Netsilikmiô to his society. In order to give a more complete picture of these relations we included the descriptions of numerous integrative forms which allowed this arctic group to survive in a harsh environment. The general social integration of this society remains, however, at the lowest level. Under these integrative practices we discovered deep-seated ingroup hostilities and anxieties. In certain circumstances of life the Netsilikmiô seems to withdraw from society and remains strongly individual centered. Rasmussen quotes one of his informants:

"When they broke camp in his grandfather's day and moved from one hunting place to another, they drove sledge behind sledge, many in company, for a long time, the first breaking the trail. As there were only few dogs, men and women had to pull too. During such a removal the snow knife was never released from the hand and as a rule a man also had his sealing harpoon with him. A man in the procession could not stop to make water without great risk, for the one who walked in front might easily get the idea that the man for some reason or other would strike him down from behind, and this suspicion alone might be sufficient cause for bloodshed. They did not trust each other; even if they apparently were the best of friends they could

never be sure that the one had not evil intentions. So it is no wonder that they were doubly cautious when meeting strangers." (Rasmussen, p. 203).

Recently a flu epidemic had put most of the Eskimos to bed. Tungilik's wife was very ill. One morning, Tungilik was asked: "How is your wife to-day?" He replied: "I haven't seen her!" A few days later she died.

It is within the framework of such a poorly integrated society, further weakened by ingroup tensions and various anxieties, that we can understand the lack of wider relatedness which appears in the life-histories of the suicides. Admitting Durkheim's generalization that suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration of religious, domestic, and political societies, we can consider Netsilik suicide as belonging to the egoistic type of suicide. "...in the same measure as we feel detached from society we become detached from that life whose source and aim is society." (Durkheim, p. 212).

However, our conclusions contradict some of Durkheim's findings. Durkheim considered that the egoistic suicide is to be found among the highly developed societies, for instance, the Protestant nations of Northern Europe. For the lower societies, strongly dominated by the "conscience collective," he reserved the altruistic type of suicide. This view of Durkheim is easily explainable

by his integrationalist conception of the lower societies and the general paucity of data on suicide among preliterate people. Since Holmberg's work among the Siriono, we know, however, better.

NOTES

Here are some concluding remarks. First, we have purposely avoided placing the different disorganizational tendencies here outlined under the heading of anomie. This concept, defined by Professor Merton as a discrepancy between individually pursued values and goals and institutionalized norms seems very useful for the analysis of certain phenomena in higher societies. For the simple Netsilik society, however, no satisfactory scale of cultural values and norms has been elaborated and this factor alone has prevented the analysis of Netsilik data with the help of that concept.

Second, for the sake of brevity, we avoided any cross-cultural comparisons. The low suicide rate among the Huron-Iroquois as recorded by Dr. Fenton, might be understood better if the highly integrated Iroquois society is contrasted with the poorly organized Netsilikmiut where a much higher suicide rate is to be found.

Third, it should be noted that despite the use of the present tense in this paper, most of our data reflect usually traditional conditions of Netsilik society. Placing our subject in time perspective would have meant some quite long digressions.

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